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ABSTRACT

A Navajo/English bilingual program uses the student's knowledge of his first language, offers the opportunity to speak in two languages, and helps the student move from the home experience to the school experience. It gives instruction in content materials to all students either in English or in Navajo and direct language instruction in both languages. The skills of understanding, speaking, reading, and writing are emphasized throughout the program. Students with little communication experience are given an aural-oral language program, and students with some reading and writing skills in their first language are given exercises to enhance second language learning. Vocabulary is presented through the structures of both languages and is taught in other areas of the curriculum. The effective bilingual program involves parents, teachers, and students and uses local bilingual resources. It emphasizes language concept development and assists each student in developing self-esteem. (EM)

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BILINGUAL TEACHING IN CONTENT AREAS: NAVAJO/ENGLISH

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Bilingual Teaching in Content Areas: Navajo/English

A bilingual program for either the Navajo or English speaker capitalizes on the student's knowledge of his/her primary language in order to continue the development of conceptual understanding and a stronger personal identity while introducing and developing facility in a second language. Enriching experiences are offered by providing opportunities to learn through doing, exploring, discovering and creating. Equally important, the program helps to provide each student with the structures and vocabulary to talk about these experiences in two languages.

By continuing the use of the student's first language, a strong line of communication is available between the home and school and between the student and school. At no point is there a break in communication because of insufficient language facility. The student is provided an immediate vehicle for communicating at all times. Even when the child has learned to manipulate the second language, both languages will continue to be developed further and used for communication and instructional purposes. Therefore, the bilingual program not only helps the student to move with ease from the home to the school environment while learning a second language without interrupting the expected learning process, but also facilitates the tools by which the student develops into a literate bilingual.

In a bilingual program, instruction in content materials should be given to all students in either Navajo or English, and direct language instruction during separate, regularly scheduled periods should be given in both English and Navajo. Instruction in the two languages should usually be different times of the day to discourage translation-type learning and minimize interference between the two languages. Code-switching the alternate use of two languages should be allowed for communication purposes until the student has good mastery of each of the two languages. Regional expressions can be "reinforced" by acceptance and proper "modeling." When Navajo is the primary language spoken in the homes, it can be assumed that the majority of those students have control over most of the sound systems of that language and knowledge of most

of its grammar with a limited English vocabulary at the time they enter school. With this in mind, the majority of first grade Navajo-speaking children should be given reading-readiness in Navajo just as a teacher would give an English-speaking child studying English. During the first few weeks the major emphasis would be understanding and speaking the first language, however, as the year progresses, the major emphasis shifts to reading and writing that language. The four skills of understanding, speaking, reading, and writing will be learned and in this order, will continue to be emphasized with varying degrees of emphasis for each skill, as long as the child remains in a bilingual program.

Some children because of their rural background do not have enough communication experiences. These children may not be provided with an adult language model or may be discouraged in their attempts at verbal communication by their parents or by the high noise level which would occur in overcrowded homes . These first grade children should spend more time in an aural-oral (understanding and speaking) language skills development program before beginning the development of the reading and writing skills. The lessons in English, when introduced, should assume no contact at all with that language and children should be taught the phonemic contrasts of the English language, as well as basic sentence patterns. Very early in the program, the sound contrasts which exist in one language, but not the other, should be taught. The concepts "same-different" need to be understood before they can be applied to the sound differences. The teacher may start by having several noise-makers in front of the class and showing and ringing two at a time. "These sounds are the same" (ring two cow bells), "these sounds are different" (ring cow bell and sleigh bell). At this stage the children can see that some bells are the same and some are different. After the concept "same-different" is understood, the objects can be hidden in a bag or box and the children asked to determine "the same" and "different" on the basis of sound alone. Small items such as beans, cotton seeds, or buttons, can be put in pill bottles covered with adhesive paper. The children may take turns shaking two bottles and deciding if they are "same" or "different." They may look inside to check their answers. The children who are

able to do this activity are ready to begin the discrimination of speech sounds in the direct language instruction periods. With older students, more complex activities could be used. The child's acquisition and automatic use of basic language structures takes precedence over the mere accumulation of vocabulary items in a second-language program. The basic patterns should be taught through the use of audio-lingual drills. If the older student has in addition some reading-writing skills in his/her first language, use available exercises to enhance and accelerate second language learning.

Initially the number of vocabulary items taught should be limited to the child's experience. Items previously learned should be practiced with known patterns and used when introducing new patterns. New vocabulary items should never be taught in isolation, but rather, they should be within phrases or sentences. A word may be isolated for purposes of explanation, but should immediately be used in a sentence in order to facilitate clarity and comprehension. An expanded vocabulary will be acquired rapidly once the child begins to read.

Similar vocabulary items may be presented through the structures of both languages, although lexical equivalence is not necessarily desirable. Also, familiarize yourself with available materials on Navajo Lexicon in the area, because sometimes there may be variations in that language depending on the area of origin of the student's family. An emphasis should be placed in all activities and experiences in the curriculum on developing the concepts for which labels can be provided in both Navajo and English. While periods of direct language instruction are necessary for maximum effectiveness and efficiency with students of all ages, the languages of instruction need not and should not be limited to one short period of the day. A teacher who is aware of the potential interference areas in the language of his students who understands how to construct varied and interesting practice exercises in such areas, can make maximum use of the instructional time and teach language along with virtually every other area of the curriculum. After all, LANGUAGE IS TEACHING AND TEACHING IS LANGUAGE.

The effective program consists of planned educational experiences that involve parents, teachers, and students; emphasizes language and concept development, assists each student in gaining a feeling of personal identity and worth, and ultimately,

produces literate, bilingual citizens.

The effective utilization of local bilingual resources is most important for a good bilingual program. Do not overlook bilingual trades-people, professional college students, and parents. They will assist in the development and maintenance of the program and in validating your curriculum materials selection criteria.